



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Northeast Regional Office

December 4, 2001

To the Vermont Wilderness Association,

I want to again express The Wilderness Society's exuberant support of the VWA's proposal for more Wilderness, National Recreation Areas and National Conservation Areas as Ben Rose publicly presented at the Forest Service's public forum on wilderness in Middlebury on November 14th. Over 350 Vermonters attended the forum, the vast majority clearly in support of more wilderness on the Green Mountain National Forest. I was newly moved by the range of their voices—from UVM students, to biologists, to religious leaders, to Vermonters from across the state. Supportive letters were read aloud from the Episcopalian Bishop of Vermont and former US Senator Robert Stafford. It was a wonderful celebration of how much people value wilderness as part of the balance across the landscape, and how much support there is for additional designations on the national forest.

It reminded me of some of the speakers I heard last summer at the National Forest Roadless Policy hearings in Rutland and New Hampshire. Like the bus driver from Burlington, who came still in his uniform to say, *"I'm a bus driver. I know roads. I want to be able to get out of my bus and off a road and go hiking in the woods where there are no roads and I can't hear any motors. Look at us--we're in the middle of a town with lots of roads. Where is the wildlife? When you build roads, you chase the animals away."*

Or the Latino woman from southern Massachusetts who said, *"I had to drive four hours to come to this hearing today because there are no hearings in Massachusetts. Our forests are gone. Do you know what it's like not to be able to walk a quarter mile through the woods without hitting another road or hearing cars?"*

Or the logger's wife from Berlin, New Hampshire who said, *"People are often put into categories--either the timber logging group or the extreme environmentalists. I don't think it is always that clear cut. I was born and raised in a mill town. My father worked in the mill. My brother has always been and still is in the logging business here. And most importantly I'm married to a logger and our only income is from the logging he does."*

I recently had the opportunity to observe a focus group on forest protection in southern New Hampshire. The 10 men and 10 women there were chosen for their lack of strong pro- or anti- environmental positions. When asked, "What do you like most about living in New Hampshire?" to a person they said "the trees, the mountains, the ocean, the people." That they can easily get out in nature. One man mentioned that "especially after September 11th, it's more important than ever to protect our forests. People need places where they feel safe, where it's quiet, and comforting, where they can hear leaves rustle." I have no doubt that a Vermont focus group would give similar answers.

Terry Tempest Williams is a western writer who writes beautifully about wilderness. She

was a close friend of Mardie Murie, who with her husband Olaus was instrumental in creating the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Terry tells of a story that Mardie related to her:

"One year, after a particularly arduous meeting, we took the members of the Governing Council of The Wilderness Society to Jenny Lake Lodge. We danced. A balance of cheerful incidents is good for people. If we allow ourselves to become discouraged, we lose our power and momentum."

She faced me directly.

"That's what I would say to you, in the midst of these difficult times. If you are going into that place of intent to preserve the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or the wildlands in Utah, you have to know how to dance."

In the midst of these trying times, when ordinary objects become vehicles of assassination; as we fear for our lives, our jobs, our soldiers, innocent people; as our environmental safeguards and civil liberties are being quietly, methodically rolled back in the name of national security, we need to have a reason to dance. Wilderness gives us such a reason. It is a fundamentally grassroots, democratic opportunity to safeguard places we love for all time for all generations. I ask Vermont's Congressional Delegation to choose this moment to lead the fight to establish more wilderness on the Green Mountain National Forest. In these dark times, give us a reason to rejoice.



Julie Wormser
Northeast Regional Director